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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2864
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 000651

LAPAZ FOR LAMBERT

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR INL/LP, INL/PC

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [DR](#) [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: NARCOTICS MAJORS LIST 2010 REQUEST FOR REPORT CARD

REF: STATE 028306

¶1. (U) The Government of the Dominican Republic (GODR) continues to make progress in combating the transient flow of illicit drugs through the Dominican Republic en-route to the United States. Although the GODR expresses a desire to combat criminal activities and continues to cooperate with the Government of the United States (USG) on a wide range of law enforcement issues including money laundering, anti-narcotics activities, community policing, internal criminal investigations and more, results have not been as positive as hoped for in all areas for a variety of reasons and endemic corruption continues to be a major problem. Post recommends the Dominican Republic be kept on the Majors, List; however, there is no compelling evidence or reason to find the Dominican Republic to have failed demonstrably.

¶2. (SBU) The Government of the United States (USG) asked the Government of the Dominican Republic (GODR) to cooperate in actions designed to build internal capacity in the area of Money Laundering and in the seizure of assets associated with these activities. The GODR responded positively in several areas. Examples:

a. In an effort to strengthen the GODR's ability to investigate and prosecute money laundering activities, the NAS developed a twelve module Anti-Money Laundering Course for investigators, prosecutors and judges. To assist our efforts, the GODR provided classroom facilities and a well publicized opening ceremony was held thus ensuring that positive support from high levels was visible. In addition, the GODR scheduled a full complement of investigators for the initial training sessions. However, during the next phase, the GODR canceled prosecutor training at the last moment. This caused a significant rescheduling problem and had a negative impact on the training curriculum.

b. During a joint two-week USG/GODR bulk cash smuggling operation called Operation Firewall, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) accompanied by GODR agencies conducted inspections at air and sea ports for undeclared cash. This resulted in the seizure of a total of \$487,236 and the arrest of three suspects. However, an official of the GODR returned over \$50,000 of the seized monies even though it had not been declared by the travelers and the Chief of the Dominican customs agency gave directions that any undeclared cash in excess of \$10,000 by one dollar was to be seized. In addition, as a result of negative press coverage, the GODR customs officials ended the operation prematurely.

c. The GODR Superintendent of Banks is in the process of establishing a Financial Analysis Unit (UAF) as part of their effort to regain Egmont Certification. NAS received a request from the GODR to assist with the provisioning of UAF offices and there has been progress and mutual cooperation in this area. NAS has confidence in the GODR's efforts toward

once again becoming Egmont Certified and the USG has found the Superintendent of Banks to be a very cooperative partner.

¶3. (SBU) The USG asked the GODR to increase efforts in the interdiction of the estimated 220 Metric Tons of drugs passing through the Central Caribbean, much of which transits through the Dominican Republic. Although the GODR expressed an attitude of cooperation in this area, successes have been very disappointing due to minimal drug seizures to date.

a. During 2008 the GODR seized a total of 2,798 kilos of cocaine and heroin combined. This is twenty-seven percent less than what was seized in 2007. Seizures in 2009 have been much lower. The seizures from January 2009 through May 2009 total approximately 414 kilos of cocaine and heroin combined. Projected out through the end of calendar year 2009, the total seizure amount would be approximately 1,000 kilos which would project to a 60 percent decrease in seizures from 2008. When compared to successes in other countries, the seizure rate in the Dominican Republic is embarrassing. A factor that impeded the GODR's ability to seize drugs was the loss of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Blackhawk helicopter support for several months. CBP stopped its support of Operation Broken Bridge from October 2008 to January 2009. After January 2009, it provided support on a limited basis by transporting the DNCD Tactical Response Team to only non-threatening areas near the drop zone. This loss of support significantly increased the challenges of GODR response to air drops made by narcotics laden aircraft from Venezuela. However, despite this setback, the GODR should be doing more in the counternarcotics area to develop capabilities to seize drugs once they are on the ground and before they are distributed.

b. The majority of seizures have been of small amounts often carried internally by passengers on aircraft, etc. Records available to NAS show the largest seizure this calendar year was 100 kilos in a marine container and there were only seven seizures that exceeded ten kilos each. Dominican coastal patrol boats provided by the USG have not had a single successful drug interdiction despite several attempts. Therefore, the USG investment of approximately \$10 million in boats has not resulted in drugs on the table; however, communications have improved. On the positive side, three months ago the new Dominican Navy Chief, Admiral Lajara Sola, was appointed and he has been very proactive and is implementing promising changes. Excuses voiced by the previous Navy Chief concerning the lack of fuel have been dispensed with and Admiral Lajara is committed to keeping the boats fully fueled and on patrol. During a recent meeting with NAS and MAAG, Admiral Lajara requested assistance in some areas and made it a point that his staff will work diligently to interdict illicit narcotics shipments on the sea and on the shore. Admiral Lajara agreed with the NAS Director that resources needed to be dependent on results and he promised that future results would be forthcoming. Among the changes he has made is the establishment of a Marine unit to patrol the coastal terrain.

c. This low seizure record is due in part to a lack of essential resources coupled with endemic corruption problems that have infiltrated the Dominican military. This limits their ability to conduct successful anti-narcotics operations. The U.S. mission is working with host nation to improve their capabilities. NAS and the DNCD have agreed to initiate an in-depth assessment of the DNCD to identify areas needing improvement and form a structured plan of action over a four year period. This is a positive sign that the GODR is reaching out for assistance. INL is in the process of exploring a program to overhaul Dominican Air Force helicopters and train pilots on night vision capabilities to improve the Dominican capacity to conduct drug interdiction operations. The GODR has enthusiastically embraced this concept and will commit substantial resources toward this project. Among the investments the GODR has made is the purchase of Super Tocano aircraft and the formation of multi-service anti-narcotic action teams strategically placed around the country.

¶4. (SBU) The endemic corruption found at all levels of the GODR is the underlying reason why counter-narcotics efforts are not paying off as well as hoped for in the Dominican Republic. Institutions such as the Directorate to Prevent

Administrative Corruption and the National Commission on Ethics, exist to combat corruption; however, over 20 years almost no one has been convicted of corruption. Also, while some big financial crime cases have been successfully prosecuted, President Fernandez issued the 2008 Christmas pardons to several persons convicted in the high-profile Baninter and Renove cases, prompting general dismay and the resignation of Pardon Commission members who said they were not consulted. There is also a growing alarm about the violence associated with narco-trafficking, the August 2008 Paya Massacre of several Colombians being a prime example. Not only were military officers involved in that case, but the money and drugs seized after the murders subsequently disappeared. Then in May 2009, the death of convicted narcotics kingpin, Florian Feliz led to revelations that he ran his criminal enterprise from a luxuriously furnished jail suite while enjoying books, plasma TV, a fully stocked bar, a private kitchen and prostitutes. On the positive side, the DNP Internal Affairs Unit has been conducting investigations of corruption and misbehavior among its ranks. Monthly reports are published showing the results of investigations and the results have included the arrest of entire police units for narcotics associated activities. Another positive signal was the recent promotion of a Navy Officer by Admiral Lajara for refusing to take a substantial bribe and then taking action against the person offering it. Although there is much work to be done, there have been some good starts.

¶5. (U) The USG asked the GODR to be responsive to USG requests for the extradition of fugitives wanted in the United States and the GODR has been cooperative in this area.

During the past two years the GODR has cooperated with the USG in the extradition of 10 fugitives in 2008 and five fugitives so far in 2009. In addition, there have been eight deportations so far this year.

¶6. (U) In conclusion, although the GODR continues to have very limited control over its land, sea and air sovereignty and this has resulted in little success in stopping the flow of illicit drugs, the GODR is implementing changes with USG assistance to rectify this situation. Over the next year, post expects to see a substantial increase in the amount of drugs and laundered money seized by the GODR. Post Point of Contact for this update is Joseph Runyon, NAS Director t runyonjh@state.gov or IVG 848-4391.

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